# New York
# Theatre Critics' Reviews
## 1944

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### THEATRE OPENINGS

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"Ten Little Indians"

*Complete reviews appear in this issue*

*Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers*

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

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# "Ten Little Indians"

Play by Agatha Christie; staged by Albert de Courville; settings by Howard Bay. Presented by the Messrs. Shubert and Mr. de Courville at the Broadhourst Theatre, June 27, 1944.

**NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN**
***June 28, 1944***

## 'Ten Little Indians' At the Broadhurst

**By ROBERT GARLAND**

WHEN, a couple or three years ago, "Ten Little Indians" appeared serially in The Saturday Evening Post under the title of "And Then There Were None"—away back, somewhere, it was also known as "The Nursery Rhyme Murders"—I found it contrived, incredible and obvious as to outcome, by no means up to the Agatha Christie standard. Last night, at the Broadhurst, I saw no reason to change my mind.

Acted out up on a lighted stage, it still seems contrived, incredible and obvious as to outcome, by no means up to the Agatha Christie standard. And this despite a careful production by Lee and J. J. Shubert, in conjunction with Albert de Courville, with direction by Mr. de Courville, himself, in person, a setting by the one and only Howard Bay, and an able and well-balanced cast.

If there isn't any mystery to a mystery play, there isn't any play. Although I had read the book and knew the answer, the Lady Who Goes to the Theatre With Me hadn't. And she, with no hint from anyone, put her finger on the supposedly mysterious killer long before the opening act was over. For the remainder of the evening there was nothing for her to do, except wait to say "I told you so!" And that, with me knowing all the time, wasn't much fun, either.

The Lady Who Goes to the Theatre With Me might just as well have stood at home.

### Ten, Count 'Em

The trouble you find with "Ten Little Indians" as a mystery melodrama is the same trouble you find with "And Then There Were None" as a mystery melo-novel. That's the author's grim determination to follow the details of the venerable nursery rhyme, even if it kills her story in so far as believability is concerned. In forcing her parallel to its bitter end she nullifies her narrative.

As the ten strangers, gathered by hook, by crook and by telephone into a remote house on the even remoter Indian Island, are bumped off one by one you're moved to laughter rather than to terror. Especially when, seated comfortably in your chair at the Broadhurst, you know exactly who is the bumper-offer. When your hair should be standing on end your eyes are wandering wishfully toward the exits.

After all, a score of homicides in quick succession can be—and is for the most part—funny. Especially when the ten who are killed are on the dull side, tiresome, credulous people who, if there were anything approaching justice in their world, would have been slain by friends or family long before they reached the pages of "And Then There Were None" or the manuscript of "Ten Little Indians."

Who cares what happens to them? Almost nobody! Which isn't as it should be.

### Unpleasant People

You just don't care about them. You don't even care about them in the able hands of the able actors the Messrs. Shubert, assisted by Mr. de Courville, have chosen to impersonate them. Even Halliwell Hobbes, who has been acting for more than 40 years, appeared in 120 plays and 200 films, and was born in Stratford-on-Avon, finds the murderous old meanie who motivates the piece a bit too much for him. So, at least, it seems!

Michael Whalen, away from Broadway for the past 12 years, with 29 pictures to his credit, is back again in the flesh as the handsome and unkillable young hero. Claudia Morgan, daughter and niece respectively of Ralph and Frank Morgan, is the equally indestructible young heroine. Since appearing with her father in "Gypsy April" she has been in 33 plays. She's a nice girl and I'm glad she didn't do the killing.

I'm glad Estelle Winwood didn't do it, either. If you hadn't known who did do it, you might have suspected Miss Winwood. She does her best to throw suspicion on herself, but all to no avail. Nicholas Joy, J. Pat O'Malley, Harry Worth—especially Harry Worth—all do their best to look guilty, but it's a waste of time. Anthony Kemble Cooper gets bumped off early in the evening, which is quite all right with me. . . .

"Ten Little Indians" left me the way it found me, damp, dejected and disinterested.

### THE CAST

| | |
|---|---|
| Rogers | Nell Fitzgerald |
| Mrs. Rogers | Georgia Harvey |
| Fred Narracott | Patrick O'Connor |
| Vera Claythorne | Claudia Morgan |
| Philip Lombard | Michael Whalen |
| Anthony Marston | Anthony Kemble Cooper |
| William Blore | J. Pat O'Malley |
| General Mackenzie | Nicholas Joy |
| Emily Brent | Estelle Winwood |
| Sir Lawrence Wargrave | Halliwell Hobbes |
| Dr. Armstrong | Harry Worth |

**NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM**
***June 28, 1944***

## More Murders Than Thrills

**By LOUIS KRONENBERGER**

EVEN though eight people are murdered in *Ten Little Indians*—and no two at a time, either—Agatha Christie's mystery play travels all too lightly up the spine. For two acts the play merely holds your interest in the mildest sort of way; and though in the third act there are some tense and almost terrifying moments, the effect as a whole is far too tame. There isn't enough of either physical or psychological excitement; there isn't drama enough in the situations or continuity enough in the suspense. And these deficiencies are all the more serious in that *Ten Little Indians* has nothing to fall back on in the way of striking characterizations, vivid atmosphere or lively dialogue. It is as lacking in distinction as in drama.

The whole thing is, indeed, too elaborate ever to become intense. Eight people are invited to visit a stranger on an island; when they arrive, their host fails to appear, but they—along with the butler and his wife—are regaled with a gramaphone record accusing all 10 of them of having committed some kind of murder. By the time each has offered his defense, Act I is well-nigh over without anything having happened.

Thereafter, folks die like flies; but not till the party gets painfully small, and the few survivors are violently suspicious of one another, does the play begin to get tense. There is plenty of action in the last 10 minutes, but it comes too late—and it also helps to slur over a pretty foolish explanation.

* * *

The first act is almost entirely wasted; but beyond that, *Ten Little Indians* suffers from being too much like a straight detective story and too little like a play. A mystery novel aims at challenging the reader's ingenuity; he studies the characters at close range, waits for slips, watches for clues. But that is not easy to do, nor particularly worth doing in the theater; there must be drama and situation, and *Ten Little Indians* has too little of either.

The entire cast plays competently, with no one distinguishing himself—if only because no one is in a position to do so. The characterizations, like the play, are quite routine.

**NEW YORK DAILY NEWS**
***June 28, 1944***

## Variety Is the Spice of Death in Murder Play, '10 Little Indians'

**By JOHN CHAPMAN**

AGATHA CHRISTIE'S "Ten Little Indians," at the Broadhust, is a welcome Summer visitor. After the spiritless comedies and vaudeville shows which lately have been arriving and departing with such regularity, it is fun to see a plain, old-fashioned whodunit with a fresh corpse every ten minutes.

Personally, I'm very fond of murder, and even though I knew beforehand who the guy was, having read Miss Christie's novel a few years back, I enjoyed last night's passings-away and carryings-off. The audience had itself a time, giving out with the low moans, suppressed shrieks and shushes which the writer of a mystery play has a right to expect.

Time was, of course, when one murder was enough to carry a novel or a stage thriller, but that was long ago. Today it takes five or six deaths just to raise a mild pulse. In last night's piece ten people are marked for rubbing out—for the plot is, quite simply, the nursery rhyme about the Ten Little Indian Boys. You know . . . "and so there were none." A good many pleasant actors get done in, but I wont' tell you just how many.

### Murderers Face Justice

"Ten Little Indians" has the proper locale for bloodlettings—a luxurious house on a lonely island off Devon. Assembled here for a weekend party are three women and seven men. They have quite plausibly been tricked into coming by a host nobody knows, who calls himself U. N. Owen. Get it? "Unknown."

The host is not present, the island is cut off, and the guests are greeted by a phonograph record which tells them off, one by one, as murderers. At some time they have killed and got away with it, but now they must pay. One is a fast-driving fool who ran down two children. Another a judge who sentenced an innocent man to die. A third a cop who framed another innocent man. A fourth a governess who seemingly allowed a child to drown.

Two others, servants who killed an employer for a legacy. A woman, a religious zealot, who drove a pregnant girl to suicide. A doctor, who bungled an operation. A general, who killed his wife's lover by giving him a suicide mission in the old war. An adventurer who apparently abandoned a group of native bearers to their deaths in the jungle.

### Vanish One by One

On the mantelpiece in the living-room, where most of the deaths occur, are ten Indian figures. As each customer gets knocked off, in exactly the manner prescribed by the rhyme, a statuette vanishes. Pretty soon you get to counting them, expectantly.

There's a storm, of course, and the lights fail, of course, but the melodrama remains legitimate. There are no clutching hands, no sliding panels. Everything is normal—except, of course, the murderous nut who is one of the ten.

The Shuberts and Albert de Courville have assembled a good company for Miss Christie's little exercise in elimination. Neil Fitzgerald, a menacing-looking butler; Claudia Morgan, always a handsome heroine; Michael Whalen, just amiable enough to be a leading man and mean enough to be suspected; Estelle Winwood, a Bible-struck old bat.

Also Halliwell Hobbes, a judicious judge; Harry Worth, a nerve specialist who has the jumps himself; Anthony Kemble Cooper, a silly-ass type who is the first to go; Nicholas

Joy, a general who accepts his fate, and J. Pat O'Malley, a glib cop. The tenth little Indian is Georgia Harvey, the butler's wife. Tenth in this list, I mean, but about No. 2 in the hit parade.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
*June 28, 1944*

## *Ten Little Indians Fine Mystery Comedy*

By BURTON RASCOE

TEN LITTLE INDIANS, a superlative type of mystery comedy by Agatha Christie, opened at the Broadhurst last night. Come hell or high water it is destined (I'd say) to run on Broadway for a long time. It is that kind of a play—top-notch escapist stuff, sheer, unmitigated, fantastic, enjoyable nonsense. Last night's audience was wildly enthusiastic about it.

Packed with the right ingredients for broad popular appeal—thrills, laughs, suspense, excitement, constant challenge to the individual's powers of perception and deduction—it is acted with melodramatic finesse and gusto, under the adroit direction of Albert de Courville, by a galaxy of such tried and tested favorites as Halliwell Hobbes, J. Pat O'Malley, Estelle Winwood and Claudia Morgan, plus others about as good as they are. And a rococo and macabre setting by Howard Bay is in just the right mood.

Mystery plays, like mystery novels, have a logic of their own but it is a very strict logic. Other plays, to be good, usually are the improbable in terms of the plausible, but the mystery play, to be good, must be the improbable and implausible, in terms of the logical. Ten Little Indians is a fine specimen of the art. Even if you are able to guess the identity of the homicidal maniac (or some one has told you) the fascination of the play is in no way lessened for you; for even on a second or third visit to the play, you will still be engrossed by the logical conclusion and how it is worked out from the premises laid down in the first act.

### English Week End

The "ten little Indians" refers to the cluster of statuettes on the mantelpiece of a weird country house on an island off the coast of Devon, when the play opens, and to the nursery rhyme embossed above them, telling how each little Indian met his death—until there was none. To this queer Byzantine mortuary eight assorted guests are invited for a week end by a mysterious host. The guests have never met one another before, nor have they met their host. Nor has the housekeeper, the butler or the boatman ever met their employer.

In America most of us would have some hesitancy about accepting a bid for a week end with someone we had never heard of; but in England, apparently, a chance to spend a week end in the country is not to be snooted at even by the snooty set, which in this play includes a knighted judge, general and a famous nerve specialist. Other guests are a former captain of the British army, a female secretary, a grim Victorian spinster, a private detective and a giddy youth just out of Oxford.

While the guests are assembled for cocktails prior to going in to dinner, a Gabriel Heatter sort of voice comes out of the air, accusing everyone present, including the two house servants, each in his turn, of murder—not the sort of murder on which a conviction can be got in the courts but a murder just the same. And while they are exchanging data on themselves and on their host (who has sent word he will not be down until the next day) one of the 10 little Indian statuettes topples off the mantlepiece and breaks—and immediately thereafter the giddy Oxonian chokes to death of cyanide of potassium which some one has dropped into his drink. One down and nine to go.

### Murder for Murder

Then the excitement begins and never lets down until the final curtain. The nerve specialist, accused of murder by operating while drunk, is pushed off a cliff; the judge, who sentenced an innocent man to die, is found limp in a chair with a gunshot wound in his head; the spinster, who drove a servant girl to suicide, is dispatched with a hypodermic; the detective, who caused an innocent man to die, is garroted; the general, who sent his wife's lover on a fatal mission, is stabbed; and so on, in a phantamagoria of gruesome (and very comical) details, involving clues, explanations, suspicions and terror.

The acting honors are all about even, and all high, with the edge probably going to Mr. Hobbes.

NEW YORK SUN
*June 28, 1944*

## *Mystery Thriller At the Broadhurst, 'Ten Little Indians'*

By ROBERT WILDER

THE average fabricator of mystery plays is usually satisfied with one good murder a night, but Agatha Christie strews no less than eight bodies across her stage, leaving but two of the original "Ten Little Indians" at the curtain's drop.

The new play is a chiller-thriller, but in the British tradition, for it is a peculiar conceit of the English to take their poison slow, and though Miss Christie plays with a lavish hand, she takes her time about the murders. There is a nice, light and frequently humorous chit-chat going on while dark and devious skullduggery lurks in the wings, a bottle of Scotch or a tin of biscuits. In the end, however, the victims are just as dead as they are in the more boisterous melodramas and that, probably, is what counts.

Presented by the Messrs. Shubert and Albert de Courville, with settings by Howard Bay and direction by Mr. de Courville, "Ten Little Indians" has reached the Broadhurst by way of London, where it has been something of a smash hit. Last night's audience proved that the desire to look upon homicide from a safe distance is almost universal and there were indications that Miss Christie's little Indians might find West 44th street to their liking.

Miss Christie lays her play in an old mansion on an island somewhere off the English coast where the only connection with the mainland is a motor launch operated, it turns out, by an unpredictable wherryman. To the house come eight guests, invited by a mysterious Mr. and Mrs. Owens who, the butler explains, have been unavoidably detained. Over spots of Scotch and soda the guests finally realize that none of them has ever actually met the host and hostess. Then, in the midst of their small talk, an off-stage voice tells them off one by one; how each, through carelessness, perjury or willful intent, has caused the death of another person.

The unknown host has also provided ten little Indian figures on a mantelpiece and above them the old nursery rhyme from which the play takes its name. As the guests, to say nothing of butler and housekeeper, become good little Indians, or dead, the statuettes drop off or disappear one by one.

The solution of a mystery play, by consent, is usually left to the audience to discover and most certainly this is no time to break with a hallowed custom and reveal more of Miss Christie's not too ingenious but absorbing plot; she kills relentlessly and with cunning.

The play has been handsomely presented and the cast includes such excellent actors as Claudia Morgan, Halliwell Hobbes, Estelle Winwood, Michael Whalen and J. Pat O'Malley.

The Broadhurst is air-conditioned for the summer months, but this would seem to be an unnecessary precaution, since Miss Christie supplies enough minor chills to cool any spine.

NEW YORK TIMES
*June 28, 1944*

## *Mass Murder*

By LEWIS NICHOLS

IF melodrama could be graded only quantitatively by the number of corpses, "Ten Little Indians" no doubt would run forever. There is no disputing the fact that it has bodies, enough of them, indeed, to fill the stage of the Broadhurst, which is large enough to comfortably enfold a musical show. But there are cynics about melodrama, students who hold that multiple murder is not the only and final test. These probably will be somewhat disappointed in Agatha Christie's play. They will say, with the cold justice always meted out to murder, that Broadway's latest evening of carnage does not quite live up to its slaughtered bodies.

And it is too bad. Miss Christie is one of the most expert of the cold-blooded killers. In "Ten Little Indians" she has a wonderful idea for mystery. Collect a group of people on a lonely island and then bump them off to the accompaniment of nursery rhymes, and to the noise of wind, rain and shrieks. In London under another title the play has been running long, and in its magazine form—"And Then There Were None"—the story was widely read. The Messrs. Shubert and Albert de Courville have given the play a good American production. Like the number of corpses and potential corpses, all the ingredients were there. But as it has turned out "Ten Little Indians" does not climb far above the potential stage.

The chief troubles with the play probably are its talkativeness and its lack of full explanation for its grisly doings. The first two acts are extremely slow, with only a few moments of excitement; the third act, when Miss Christie and her players really settle down to murder, is far the best. There is no secret that one of the ten Indians is after the other nine, but the methods he uses for homicide are not shown clearly enough for stage purposes. Too often murder goes on away from the living room, which is the scene; an audience hears that people are being killed all over the island and it would rather like to watch.

The cast is a good one and gives "Ten Little Indians" all in its power. Claudia Morgan and Estelle Winwood play the two main feminine roles; Michael Whalen, Nicholas Joy and Halliwell Hobbes are the important men. Mr. Hobbes, in the role of a calmly analytical judge, gives a fine performance; he is quite believable even when sometimes the circumstances are not. Howard Bay has designed a good setting for the slaughter, and there is a nice touch of ten little china Indians on the mantlepiece disappearing one by one.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
*June 28, 1944*

## *And Then There Were None*

By HOWARD BARNES

A HIGH CLASS melodrama has come to the Broadhurst to brighten summer theater doings. Agatha Christie's "Ten Little Indians" is mannerly, literate and occasionally terrifying. For two full acts it builds up suspicion and suspense in a masterly fashion, even though the principals are dropping in their tracks in every scene. The final stanzas sag a bit, chiefly because a literary device wears thin on the stage. On

the whole, the show is a superior bit of nonsense in its special field.

• • •

It is unfortunate that the play does not bear the original title of "And Then There Were None," which it had in book form and in the London presentation. It is the tag line of the nursery rhyme which has inspired Miss Christie. Blithely ignoring violent death and the decimation of her cast, the author has a homicidal field day right up to the final curtain. Since the performers in the current offering are quite unselfish about dying for Thespis, brilliant bits of acting constitute an engaging melodramatic mosaic.

• • •

Since you must know what happened to the little Indians, it is only relevant in a review of a mystery show to tell you that two of the characters survive the carnage. As the other eight meet their various violent ends, one can do plenty of guessing about whodunit. The piece has a nice spatial unity, being laid on an island off the coast of England where there are no interlopers. It has several scenes of deft characterization, which serve to do a bit more than mystify an audience. Miss Christie writes well for the theatre. She is awfully careless about rubbing out good players.

• • •

Estelle Winwood, for example, builds up a captivating and sinister portrayal of a religious hypocrite. Halliwell Hobbes is superb as a cool-headed judge, who properly deduces that some member of the ten house guests on the island is having grisly fun putting a nursery rhyme into practice. Claudia Morgan, Michael Whalen, Nicholas Joy, J. Pat O'Malley and the others are not far behind them in contributing believable impersonations to the proceedings. Most of them tarry too briefly on the stage. The ending of "Ten Little Indians" is definitely anti-climactic. With the excellent acting and the taut staging of Albert de Courville, it still manages to be a pleasantly chilling hot-weather entertainment.

**NEW YORK POST**
***June 28, 1944***

## *Agatha Christie Does Some Spine Chilling With 'Ten Little Indians'*

**By WILELLA WALDORF**

WITH a slight shift in the ending, Agatha Christie's mystery novel, known in England as "The Nursery Rhyme Murders" and in America as "And Then There Were None," has been made into a generally entertaining, frequently exciting, stage thriller called "Ten Little Indians," produced last night at the Broadhurst.

Broadway hasn't had a good bang-up thriller since "Angel Street," and now that nearly everybody has seen that one, two or three times, "Ten Little Indians" should settle down very comfortably to the task of spine-chilling the populace during the hot weather.

The change in ending, which will be pounced upon at once by all avid Christie readers, is in the interest of romance. It removes some of Mrs. Christie's original ruthlessness, but it does not violently distort the plot, nobody is going to care very much, especially since she herself is credited with the dramatization.

**Hosts Who Weren't There**

Those who never read the book will hardly want to be regaled with an extensive outline of the plot. It is enough to say that the story concerns an oddly assorted group marooned on an island off the Devon coast, all having come as guests of a mysterious couple called Mr. and Mrs. Owen, who don't happen to be there.

Above the mantel-piece is a scroll featuring the old nursery rhyme about the ten little Indians who became nine, then eight, then seven and so on until there were none. On the mantel are ten Indian figures, and they soon begin to disappear. . . .

The dramatization is a workmanlike job and the Shubert-de Courville production at the Broadhurst under Albert de Courville's direction is a good one, all transpiring in one of Howard Bay's excellent sets. Furthermore, the play is uncommonly well cast. Those who die early in the evening are just as expert as those who linger on.

**A Competent Cast**

Halliwell Hobbes as a learned judge, J. Pat O'Malley as an ex-Scotland Yard sleuth, Nicholas Joy as a retired general, Anthony Kemble-Cooper as a vapid young man about town, Estelle Winwood as a strait-laced lady who reads the Bible every day, Harry Worth as a nerve specialist in need of some of his own treatments, Claudia Morgan as a lovely young secretary, Michael Whalen as an adventurous ex-soldier, are all competently convincing as the bewildered guests who eventually realize that one of their number is a homicidal maniac. The two servants included in the carnage are Neil Fitzgerald as the butler (who isn't the guilty party) and Georgia Harvey as his wife who gets her lethal dose early. The eleventh name in the program is that of Patrick O'Connor, the boatman who never came back.

The Broadhurst has a good cooling plant but the atmosphere will probably be several degrees lower than usual during the run of "Ten Little Indians" while the audience's blood runs cold.

# *"Love on Leave"*

Comedy by A. B. Shiffrin; staged by Eugene S. Bryden; settings by Paul Morrison. Presented by Charles Stewart and Martin Goodman at the Hudson Theatre, June 20, 1944.

**NEW YORK TIMES**
***June 21, 1944***

## *Golly!*

**by LEWIS NICHOLS**

SOMEWHERE in the grim reaches of last evening's second act, one of the folks remarked, "I came to this metropolis because this is where the theatre is." That may have been true of the old days, but if many more things like "Love on Leave" find their way to Broadway, the theatre will be like Annie, not living here any more. Snatching at the drama's current love, juvenile delinquency, A. B. Shiffrin has pummeled it into a morbid shape, and he and the cast combine to give the Hudson a determinedly dreadful evening. Since June 1, the side streets off Times Square have seen some pretty fancy shambles, but the wise money this morning probably will ride on "Love on Leave."

It is about that fifteen-year-old girl again, that fifteen-year-old girl and the sailor who has a little sister of his own. Does she wish to see life so that she can become an actress? Heaven help her, she does. Does the sailor take her home from the hotel room before something that would not be worse than "Love on Leave" has happened to her? Yep. Do the members of the cast speak slyly by innuendo, and flatly by humor? Indeed. Millard Mitchell, who usually can be counted on for a cheerful performance, finds the role of the lunatic-fringe father too much for him, and

**THE CAST**

| | |
|---|---|
| Sam Wilson | Millard Mitchell |
| Mary | Mary Sargent |
| Paula | June Wilson |
| Lucy | Rosemary Rice |
| Larry Draper | James Dobson |
| Robert Lewis | Stanley Bell |
| Flo | Joann Dolan |
| Hoagy | Bert Freed |
| Nick Hardy | John Conway |
| Slim | Ramsay Williams |
| Dr. Graham | Ross Matthew |
| Mrs. Lewis | Eleanor Gordon |
| A Policeman | Roderick Maybee |
| Sergeant | John Farrell |

a fair share of his fellow players just act the thing as though it had no bearing on life or on themselves. Likely they are right.

Shore Patrol, front and center! Take over!

**NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE**
***June 21, 1944***

## *Delinquent*

**By HOWARD BARNES**

IF you are still interested in plays about juvenile delinquency, by all means visit "Love On Leave." It propounds the curious theorem that wayward girls are merely trying to become good actresses; that sailors on leave wish nothing more than to educate them properly. The new comedy at the Hudson, unfortunately, works overtime to achieve a Q.E.D. It pushes some excellent players all over the lot in trying to give comic emphasis to an essentially tragic situation.

• • •

There is Millard Mitchell, for example, who has never failed a script to my knowledge, pretending that he is a famous child psychologist. He is understandably ill at ease as a high-priced writer, telling readers what to do about their daughters and finding his youngest dubiously involved with the Navy. To his ever increasing credit, let it be said that he rides the show like a fellow standing on his head on a surf board. His wry humor and his genuine impersonation of a bewildered papa constitute the best portions of a rather sorry whimsy.

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A. B. Shiffrin, the author, might have chosen a better subject for a burlesque. His plot is always skittering in and out of the clinical findings that made "Pick-Up Girl" grim; and then making a big bid for laughter. He has written passages of amusing dialogue. He has wisely kept his best lines for the final act. But he has quite failed to imbue a rather somber theme with amusement. Furthermore, he has discarded the original title of "Spare the Rod," which best describes his piece, in spite of a contrived ending.

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Mitchell does a miraculous job as pivot man of the proceedings. Mary Sargent is coyly ludicrous as the Astoria housewife who asks her husband why he doesn't write shorter words when he is being paid three cents

apiece for them. John Conway contributes a pleasant portrayal of the nice sailor who refrains from seducing a fifteen-year-old girl after she invades his hotel room and Rosemary Rice plays the would-be wayward girl with unrestrained enthusiasm. "Love on Leave" serves at least one purpose. It should stop the theater from investigating juvenile delinquency for a time.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
*June 21, 1944*

## *Love on Leave Unfunny Comedy on Delinquency*

By BURTON RASCOE

SLIGHTLY to vary a French aphorism, nobody is satisfied with his position in life but everybody is satisfied with his sense of humor. Not to deviate from the general rule, I am satisfied with a sense of humor that does not embrace a capacity to find anything funny about juvenile delinquency.

For that reason I was deeply depressed by Love on Leave, which opened at the Hudson last night, while a score or so whose sense of humor differs from my own found the proceedings quite comic and one chap in particular guffawed so loudly at things which nobody else found laughable that necks were craned and eyebrows raised in his direction—whether in appreciation or depreciation of his wonderful sense of humor I don't know.

Some, whose sense of humor is restricted, omitted to return after the first act and some others joined them in absenting themselves after the second act. In all fairness to the author, A. B. Shiffrin, these people might have been better pleased by the third act; it had sentiment, and some artificial lines which might have given them some smiles or chuckles if not any deep-seated laughter.

### Not Comedy Material

From my point of view, Mr. Shiffrin had a valid notion for an effective serious drama, but not for a comedy. He wished to scotch the too generally accepted fallacy that all enlisted men in the United States Navy are bent upon debauching teen-age girls. It is a libel that needs scotching. Vast numbers of the youngsters now wearing sailor uniforms are normally clean-minded idealistic kids, fresh from conventional and religious American families on farms, in small towns and great cites; they come from all classes, rich and poor, the educated and the illiterate. Hundreds of thousands of them wouldn't pick up a tart, even if they knew how or where to do so.

Again, Mr. Shiffrin had a valid notion for a serious drama when he thought of having a well-trained, intelligent, decently educated young navy enlisted man, unwittingly made the victim of a weak-minded, hysterical little 14-year-old liar, who accused him of "plying her" with drink, taking her to a hotel room and raping her, when, as a matter of fact, the had restored the silly little mental defective to her parents as soon after he laid eyes on her as he possibly could.

In a competent playwright's hands, you have there the gist of a touching and thoughtful drama. But Mr. Shiffrin tries to make a farce out of it. Moreover, he complicates it with a third notion. He thought it would be funny and satirical to have this girl the daughter of a famous specialist in child psychology.

### Scientist Made a Fool

Now, it is quite true that there are fakers in every profession; and it is also quite true that qualified specialists in the domain of psychology sometimes have to bear the cross of an unhappy situation in their own families. But the Sam Wilson (Millard Mitchell) of this "comedy" is not established as a faker but as a consummate and incredible fool, surrounded and dealing with amateurish burlesques of human beings. There is not a line, a characterization, a situation in the play that I could believe in. Besides, the tone was all wrong.

What is worse, Mr. Shiffrin attempts to mislead the audience toward the expectation of tragedy by having a 14-year-old girl, supposedly sent to bed by her prominent and respectable parents, make her way out of the house dressed like a juvenile Sadie Thompson, and end up in a shabby hotel room with a sailor, whom she tries to impress with her value as a streetwalker. . . . And all played as though this were laughable, if true. . . . As fine an acter as Millard Mitchell seemed, in the third act, to give up trying to give any credibility to his absurd role. No wonder the others were at a loss. The sets by Paul Morrison are very good.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
*June 21, 1944*

## *'Love On Leave' In Hudson Debut*

By ROBERT GARLAND

MAN and boy, I've been going to the theatre for nigh on half a century. And, in all those fifty years, I've never seen anything to compare with last night's major mishap at the Hudson. Even now, right after it's over, I don't believe it. It must have been a nightmare. People, especially Millard Mitchell, couldn't speak those lines. People, especially Millard Mitchell, couldn't act out those situations. Not up on a Broadway stage, with footlights full upon them.

"Love on Leave," which is the mishap's title, hits a new low in the theatre. Written by A. B. Shiffrin, staged by Eugene S. Bryden, backgrounded by Paul Morrison, and produced by Charles Stewart and Martin Goodman, it's something that shouldn't happen to any season in the theatre. This not too particular season of 1944-45 will go down in history as the season in which "Love on Leave" was spoken out loud, in public, up on a lighted stage. It's even worse than last year's "Victory Belles."

It's worse than anything you might imagine, really. There were times last night at the Hudson when you turned to your neighbors —Julia Hoyt, say, or Burton Rascoe, Lee Shubert or Jack Nicholas—and asked if such and such a thing were actually going on. And they, incredible as I, actually nodded "Yes." Actors were saying those lines. Actors were going through those gestures. And the audience, if I may call it such, was apparently enjoying it. Hand-picked, that audience should have stood in bed.

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"Love on Leave" has to do with a Sam Wilson who writes pieces for the bigger and better magazines. His topic is juvenile delinquency and what to do about it. Coming right out and saying so he's all against it. But his 15-year-old daughter isn't. She, it seems, wants to step out and meet people. Especially sailors! So, with a girl-friend who knows her way around Times Square, she does so. Luckily for her, she meets up with a sheep in wolf's clothing, a gob with a mother complex.

This gob is something for the record. He's on the beach. He's in Times Square. He's with a buddy who goes in for girls—the dastard! But all he wants is a chocolate ice cream soda. So, when a 15-year-old lassie shows up from the Wilson's apartment out in Astoria, he gives her a good talking to, and, sharing his chocolate ice cream soda with her, takes her home to mamma. If I were in the Navy, I'd sue last night's offering for defamation of character. Never was there such a goofy-goofy gob.

Never was there such a goofy-goofy story. Maybe it's supposed to be daring. I wouldn't know! There's no small number of three letter words. There's quite a bit of three-letter suggestion. There's a bed, a telephone booth and an off-stage hotel room in which to be naughty. But nothing happens. Or, if it does, the words are so incredible, the situations are so banal, the sinning is so sophoric, that it leaves you flat and frustrated. "Love on Leave" isn't a play. It's a mishap.

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Millard Mitchell is much too good an actor to get mixed up with this sort of thing. You who've seen him as the belligerent bookie in "Three Men on a Horse," as the intellectual scenarist in "Boy Meets Girl," as the window-cleaning lawyer in "See My Lawyer," as Sergeant Mullins in "Mr. and Mrs. North" and the dyspeptic director in "Kiss the Boys Good-bye," expect better things than the Sam Wilson he's working with up on the Hudson's stage. Millard Mitchell just can't be as hard up as he seems to be in "Love on Leave."

The others are at their wits end. There's a Mary Sargent who made her stage debut with William Faversham and Maxine Elliott in "Lord and Lady Algy." There's a John Conway who made his stage debut in "The Man Who Came to Dinner." There's a Stanley Bell who, although born in the United States, is of English extraction. He plays the role of Robert Lewis, and plays it very badly. And there's a Rosemary Rice who stepped out of "Pick-Up Girl" for this one. Maybe she knows why, I don't.

Bert Freed left "One Touch of Venus" to appear in "Love on Leave." And so it goes! But the point is—if there is a point to so unbelievable a disaster as "Love on Leave" —how could anybody leave anything for last night's theatrical misdemeanor in 44th Street?

Last night's theatrical misdemeanor at the Hudson is the worst play I have even seen in well nigh a half-century of first-nighting. Now that it has all been put down in writing, I still don't believe it. Let's pretend it didn't happen.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
*June 21, 1944*

## *'Love on Leave Has Many Funny Moments, But Wobbly Ones, Too*

By JOHN CHAPMAN

THE pick-up girl, who has been observed seriously in "Pick-Up Girl," now gets semi-farcical treatment in "Love on Leave," at the Hudson. Last night's first audience spent a good bit of the time laughing loud and I frequently joined in—but I'm sourpuss enough to state that "Love on Leave" is only moderately attractive because it wavers so.

It begins as an interesting comedy about a 15-year-old dope, female, who thinks she should learn about life because she wants to be an actress. At intervals thenceforth it attempts to remain real, but in the end gives up and expends the rest of its energy trying to be a fast farce.

The 15-year-old is one of the daughters of a gent who writes articles about the proper rearing of children. In the company of a floozy friend she picks up a sailor in the Rialto Theatre subway entrance in Times Square. This hearty gob takes the babes to a hotel, where his pal is waiting.

### A Seagoing Gentleman

The pal, though a sailor, turns out to be a nice guy who talks English, writes to his mother, drinks chocolate sodas and respects womanhood. So, much against her wishes, he takes the little idiot right home.

The farcical complications involve distracted parents, nosey neighbors, cops, phone calls and gunplay. They don't always come off . . . and, as George Abbott has remarked, in doing such a play one should never let the audience catch up. Last night I kept catching up—and even getting ahead.

I got the most fun out of the broad antics of Bert Freed as a husky, frisky, jitterbug sailor on the town for a little innocent pleas-